

Executive Function Skills: Why They Matter for Mental Wellness, and What We Can Do to Support Them!



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OCDSB Parent Webinar
Wed, Sep 17, 2025 6:30-8PM
Virtual (Webinar)



Schedule

6:30-7:30 PM	Presentation	60-min
7:30-8:00 PM	Questions	30-min



Objectives

- By the end of this session, participants will be able to:
 - List what children and youth need for mental health and wellness;
 - Name the components of executive function skills, and how problems with executive function can block us from reaching mental health and wellness;
 - List simple ways (including tweaks and nudges) on how families and caregivers can support executive function to help our youth overcome executive function barriers to reach mental health and wellness.



Introduction

What Do Most Parents Want for their Kids?

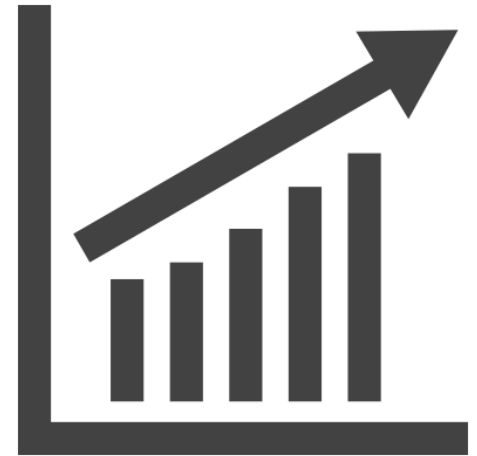
“I just want them to be happy.”

Mental Health Concerns are Common

- 20% ~ 1 in 5 children/youth
 - Experience some form of mental health issue during childhood/adolescence ([Children's Mental Health Ontario](#)).
 - **Of this 20%, only 1 in 6 receive help or treatment.**
- 10% ~ 1 in 10 children/youth
 - Have a mental health condition diagnosed by a health professional ([Public Health Ontario, 2024](#))
- Most common conditions in children/youth
 - Anxiety disorders (5%)
 - ADHD (5%)
 - Depression (2.5%)

Mental Health Concerns Rising Since 2019

- More students are reporting mental health distress than before
 - 26% reporting “poor” or “fair” mental health (2023 Canadian Health Survey) (has doubled since 2019)
 - 51% of students (Gr. 7-12) report moderate to severe psychological distress (has doubled since 2015)
- More children/youth than ever are presenting to hospital emergency departments for mental health issues
 - Increased 54% since 2015 ([Children’s Mental Health Ontario](#))



What Do We Need for Mental Wellness?

Basic Needs

Attachment

- Face-to-face



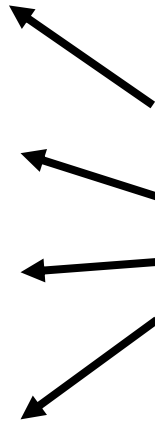
Sleep



Nature



Nutrition



Higher Needs



Belonging

Purpose

Meaning

Hope including

- **School**



Belonging, Purpose, Meaning and Hope

Belonging	Feeling securely, deeply connected to other people; secure means that people can empathize, validate and accept you unconditionally (as opposed to feeling disconnected, lonely, having conflicts, conditional acceptance)
Purpose	Knowing that your life has a purpose, such as our family roles (e.g. being a parent, a daughter / son, etc.), our work roles (e.g. a teacher, a healer, a helper), or our passions (e.g. volunteering, social activism, etc.)
Meaning	Knowing that what we do matters <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Might be the same as our purpose (e.g. a social worker that makes a difference)• Might be different (e.g. data entry clerk whose work is not meaningful, but who volunteers in their community)
Hope	Knowing that things stay good, or get better in the future (as opposed to getting worse)

Cases

Has this Ever Happened to You?

- Despite the fact that you have given many reminders...
 - Your child wakes up late.
 - Your child is late getting ready for school.
 - Your child's room is a mess, with toys strewn everywhere.
 - Your child interrupts you in the middle of conversations.
 - Your child keeps forgetting to do the chores you asked them to do, like feed the dog.
 - Your child gets upset over something trivial.

How Might a Parent/Caregiver Respond?

- Since its 2025
 - Empathy
 - Validation
 - Acceptance

Its okay, I love you.
Its normal to have troubles
with
We'll try again next time...



How Might a Parent/Caregiver Respond?

- Old school parenting
 - Correction
 - Gentle correction
 - Not so gentle correction
 - Take away privileges

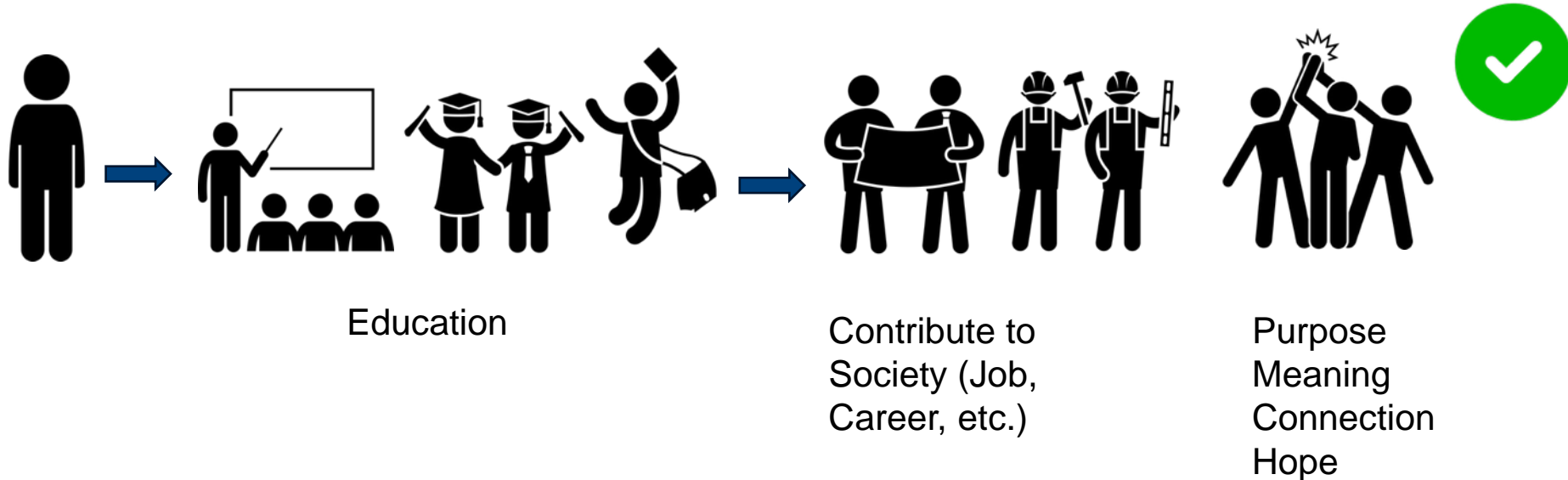
No more screen time for you!

Why can't you just ____
How many times do I have to remind you?
Why can't you just...
When I was your age...



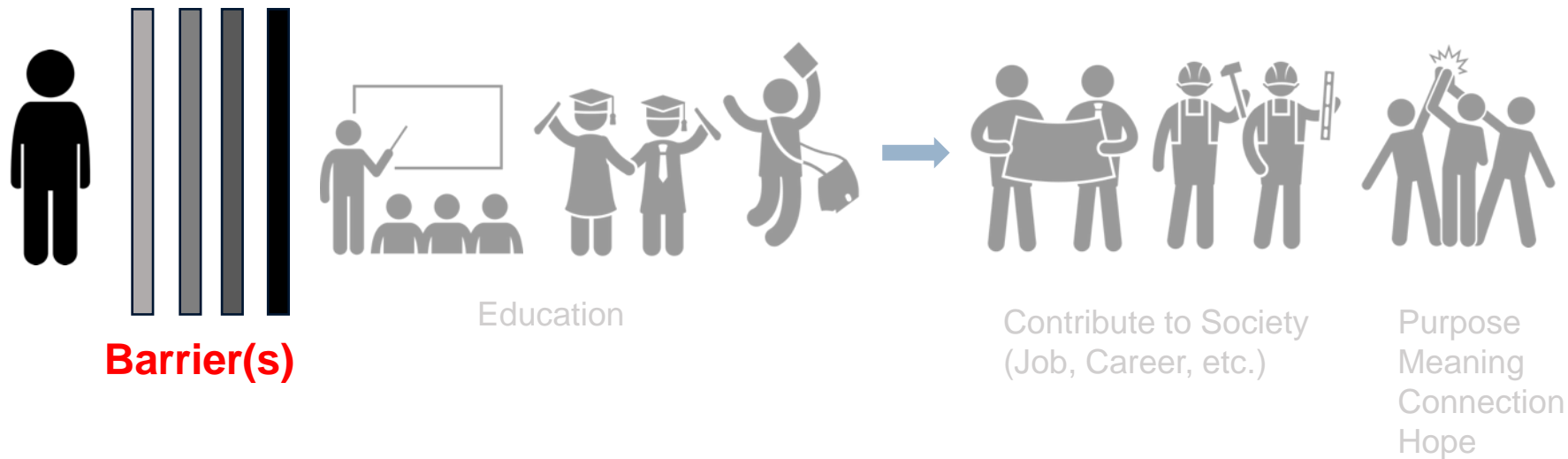
People Do Well If They Can

- People do well if they can.
- Every child, youth (and parent) wants to manage their daily demands (home, school, work) and be happy, successful in life.



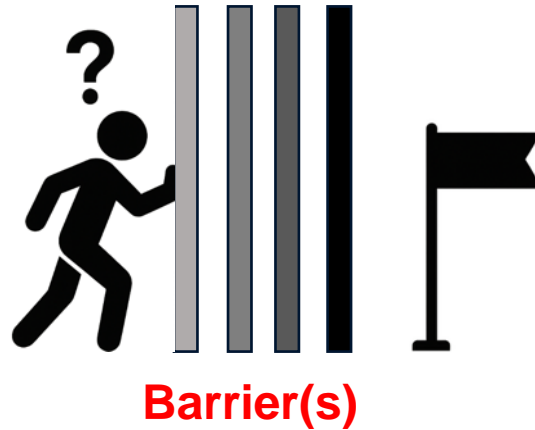
People Do Well If They Can

- If people are struggling, then there is a **barrier**
 - Deep down, everyone wants to do well thus...
 - The **barrier** is usually not simply 'poor motivation' or 'laziness'



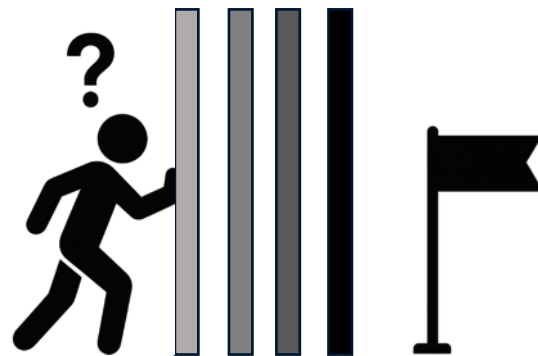
People Do Well If They Can

- It is up to the adults to explore



Barriers Include...

- Psychosocial determinants of health
 - Poverty, housing, financial barriers
- Mental health issues
 - Depression, anxiety, substance use
 - **ADHD, learning issues**
- Stresses
 - School / Work
 - People
- Medical / physical stresses
 - Medical conditions
- Neurodevelopmental issues
 - Autism spectrum, intellectual disability, sensory processing issues, motor / coordination issues, etc.
- **Executive function problems**



Barrier(s)

What is Executive Function?

What is Executive Function?

- Executive function refers to the ability to reach our goal (or complete tasks), such as:
 - Control our attention,
 - Remember instructions,
 - Self-regulate, i.e. manage emotional reactions and behaviours
 - Organise our thinking.
- Many students can easily achieve their goals.
- Many students cannot.
- It is essential that we provide the right supports to support their executive function so that they can achieve their tasks.

Conductor Metaphor

- The brain is like a symphony orchestra.
- Brain functions (memory, attention, emotions, etc.) are like the players in the orchestra.
- Without a conductor to cue them, set the tempo, and coordinate their entries, the music can become chaotic or out of sync.
- When a child's executive function skills are struggling, it's like the conductor is absent, tired, or distracted.
- Each section of the orchestra may still "know" the notes, but they come in at the wrong time, play too loudly, or miss cues.

**1. Response Inhibition (RI)
(Impulse Control)**

2. Working Memory (WM)

3. Emotional Control (EC)

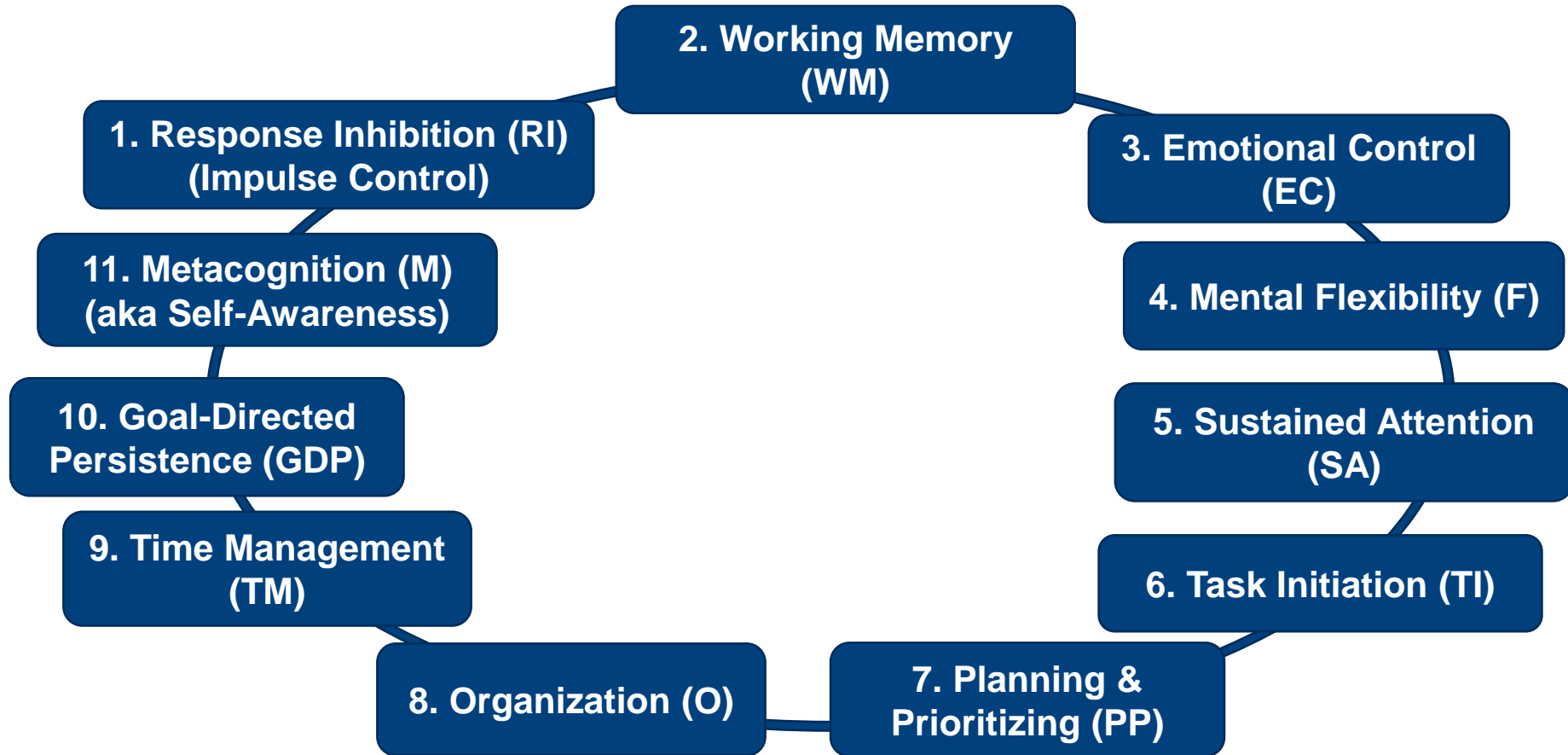
5. Sustained Attention (SA)

4. Mental Flexibility (F)



What are the Executive Functions?

Dawson & Guare's 11 Executive Functions



Executive Functions In Detail

1. Response Inhibition (RI) (aka Impulse Control)

- Capacity to “**think before you act**”
- Example of good impulse control
 - Person able to wait their turn (vs. unable to wait their turn)
 - Person doesn’t impulsively say things (vs. says inappropriate, negative things when upset that they regret)
- Example of poor impulse control
 - Person seeks out whatever gives instant gratification or easy dopamine/adrenaline.
 - Child just grabs or takes things from others.
 - Student hits another student and gets into trouble.
 - Instead of doing homework, a student decides to watch TV.



2. Working Memory (WM)

- Ability to remember and recall information that you need in order to get complex tasks done.
- Example of good working memory
 - Can able to remember multi-step instructions about the task.
 - Can hold a conversation remembering details you have told them.
- With poor working memory
 - Unable to follow instructions, because they can't remember what you told them.
 - Have to re-read things.
 - Troubles following conversations.



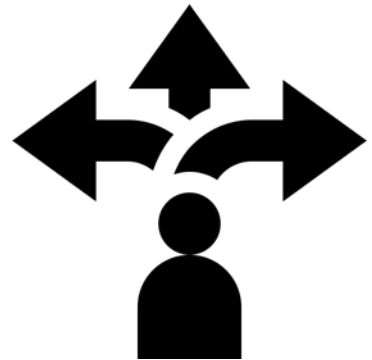
3. Emotional Control (EC)

- Ability to keep our emotions in check, and ‘stay in the green zone’, make rational, logical decisions.
- Good emotional control
 - Able to stay in the ‘green zone’ (calm), despite various stresses.
- Poor emotional control
 - Easily triggered into “yellow” (emotional upset) or “red zone” (fight, flight or freeze).



4. Flexibility (F)

- Flexibility is the ability to:
 - Tolerate unexpected changes,
 - To revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information and possibilities, or mistakes.
- Good flexibility
 - Student who can adapt to unexpected changes, e.g. substitute teacher; changes in schedule, etc.
- Poor flexibility
 - Person is easily overwhelmed by triggers such as
 - Unexpected changes / transitions
 - Sensory triggers



5. Sustained Attention (SA) (aka Distractibility)

- Sustained attention (aka Attentional control) is paying attention long enough to complete tasks, even in the face of distractions.
- Good attention
 - Student is able to stay focused on what the teacher is saying, even despite students making noise in the hallway.
- Poor attention
 - Student is easily distracted, because they are distracted by what's outside the window, people in the hallway, and classmates shuffling paper.



6. Task Initiation (TI)

- Ability to get started on a task in a timely fashion, even if it is tough.
- Challenges can happen when a task is too hard or too boring, leading people to avoid or procrastinate.
- Good task initiation
 - When you give a math assignment, the student starts it promptly (and thus finishes it promptly.)
- Poor task initiation
 - Doesn't start assignment until the last minute
 - Student overwhelmed by the task, perceiving it as a stress that leads them to go into “flight / freeze.”

START



7. Planning/Prioritization (PP)

- Ability to set a goal, make steps for completing that goal, as well as prioritize things.
- Good planning/prioritization
 - When you give this student a complex task, they are able to plan out all the steps and complete the task.
- Poor planning / prioritization
 - Student is unable to finish science project because they didn't have a plan.



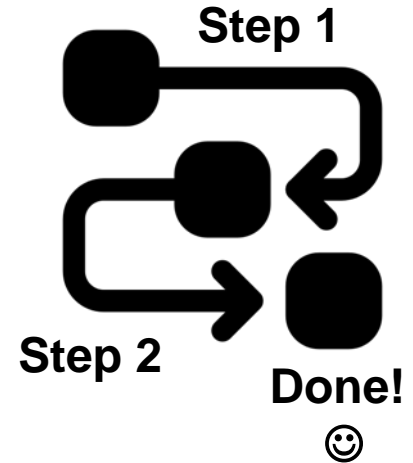
8. Organization (O)

- Keeping belongings and tasks neat and tidy, and having your materials ready to use.
- Good organization
 - Student has a tidy desk and binder, and has all the things they need.
- Poor organization
 - Students can't find the things they need for school, late for school, etc.
 - Student actually completed the assignment, but forgot it at home.



9. Time Management (TM)

- The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines.
- Good time management
 - When told about an upcoming test, the student able to study ahead of time and do well on the test.
- Poor time management
 - On a test, the student rushes through the answers (i.e. using too little time), or
 - Student does poorly on a project as they misjudged how much time they need.



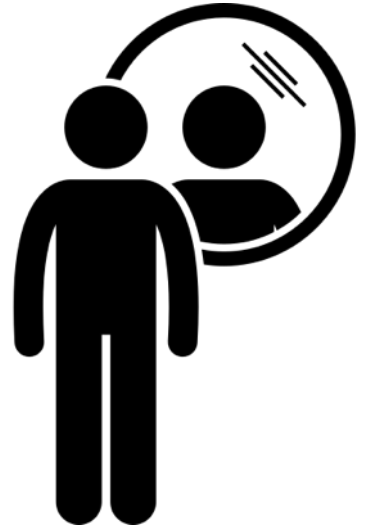
10. Goal Directed Persistence (GDP)

- The ability to persist on completing a goal, activity or task, even when the task is boring, interrupted.
- Good GDP
 - Student doing science project keeps getting interrupted at home, but is able to persist in doing the project until it is done.
- Poor GDP
 - Student doing science project that gives up when he can't find the book he needs for his research.



11. Metacognition (M) (Self-Awareness)

- Metacognition (aka Self-monitoring) involves
 - Examine one's behavior, make changes for the future.
 - See your behaviours from an objective / outside perspective.
- Good self-awareness
 - Student does poorly on a test is able to see their role, and accept feedback from the teacher.
- Poor self-awareness
 - Lack of insight into their own contribution to problems.
 - As a result, the person tends to feel issues are others' fault.
- Classic conditions
 - People with Autism Spectrum Disorder



How Common are Executive Function Problems?

What Causes Executive Function Problems?

- Genetics (“Nature”)
 - Neurodevelopmental disorders such as
 - ADHD,
 - ASD,
 - Learning disorders,
 - Tourette Syndrome
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (“Nurture”)
 - Stress, trauma (especially worries about violence),
 - Early deprivation (i.e. neglect, lack of stimulation) → particularly bad for memory.

EF Problems Occur In 50-100% of Many Conditions

Condition	Common EF Issues Seen
ADHD	Impulse control, working memory, planning.
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Rigidity, inflexibility, self-regulation issues.
Learning Disabilities	May commonly have troubles with working memory or planning.
Traumatic Brain Injury	Impulse control, emotional regulation issues
Depression, anxiety	Troubles with emotional regulation, impulse control, cognitive flexibility.
Anorexia nervosa	Starvation causes various EF difficulties, e.g. cognitive inflexibility.
Substance use issues	Impulse control, working memory
Poor sleep from any cause	Troubles with any EF skill!

EF Occurs in up to 30% of “Normal” Population

- Children (aged 6-12)
 - 10-30% have issues on EF rating scales **for their age.**
 - Note
 - 5-9% of children have ADHD.
- Adolescents (age 12-18)
 - 15-25% have issues with EF-related problems
- Adults (age 18+)
 - 10-15% have issues for everyday EF-related problems



EF Challenge Checker

1 Always	2 Often	3 Sometimes	4 Rarely	5 Never	
EF Challenge Checker for Kids					
<small>© Laurie Faith, 2016, www.ActivatedLearning.org</small>					
Item	RESPONSE INHIBITION				Score
1	Even if I'm full, I just can't stop eating and nibbling.				
2	I blurt stuff out in class.				
3	I start work before I've heard all of the instructions. I rush off.				
Total Score for Response Inhibition					
WORKING MEMORY					
4	I forget what I was saying halfway through.				
5	If I get too many instructions, I can't remember them all.				
6	It's hard to hold a few things in my head at once. (Like chess moves.)				
Total Score for Working Memory					
EMOTIONAL CONTROL					
7	I feel upset when a teacher tells me I've done something wrong or to change my work.				
8	If something frustrating happens I take a long time to calm down.				
9	I get worried about things being perfect. I don't like starting on a project if I'm not sure I can get it perfect.				
Total Score for Emotional Control					
FLEXIBILITY					
10	I really dislike it when things change unexpectedly - like a cancelled gym class.				
11	I find it hard to work in groups. I'd rather stick to my own thinking and ideas.				
12	I don't like thinking of different ways to solve problems. I like to know the one BEST way.				
Total Score for Flexibility					
SUSTAINED ATTENTION					
13	My mind wanders when I'm reading. I'll suddenly realize I haven't been paying attention.				
14	When listening to people talk I sometimes lose focus and say, "Wait... what?"				
15	I don't pay very good attention to proofreading when I'm writing. I don't notice the little details like punctuation and spelling.				
Total Score for Sustained Attention					
TASK INITIATION					
16	I find it hard to start my homework. I procrastinate.				
17	Waking up in the morning is really hard. It's hard to get going.				
18	I like making big plans but don't like starting on them.				
Total Score for Task Initiation					

- Free, 3-page questionnaire that asks 3 questions about each of the 11 executive functions
- Higher numbers are better; lower numbers indicate difficulties.
- Simple way to identify EF challenges and provide more specific strategies and recommendations.

<https://activatedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/EF-Checker-for-Kids.pdf>

Why is EF such a Big Deal?

Bad News and Good News

- When children and youth have poor EF skills, this predicts future issues and challenges ([Miller, 2012](#))
 - Poor academics
 - Behavioural, social and emotional difficulties
 - Mental health issues
 - Future problems with successful employment
- EF skills is a stronger predictor of outcomes than IQ.

Can EF Skills Be Improved?

Research Shows EF Can be Improved

- Early interventions / preschool programs
 - Programs that target self-regulation and EF in early childhood show promise
 - Examples
 - Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP)
 - Showed that classroom interventions improved EF and reduced behavioural problems; long-term academic benefits were found.



Research Shows EF Can be Improved

- Interventions that improve EF functions include ([Diamond, 2011](#))
 - Aerobic exercise
 - Martial arts
 - Yoga
 - Mindfulness
 - School curriculum
 - Non-computerized games
 - **Specific strategies that we will talk about today!**
- EF interventions work best when they are part of a child's school / home environment ([Diamond, 2014](#)).

What Parents Can Do

**Parents / Caregivers Are Key in
Teaching by Modelling EF Skills**

General Parenting Approaches

- Lifestyle Strategies

- Sleep



- Healthy nutrition



- Physical activity



- See primary care provider for health issues;



General Parenting Approaches

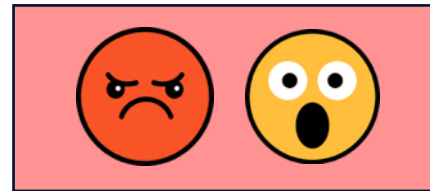
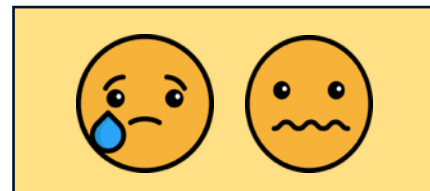
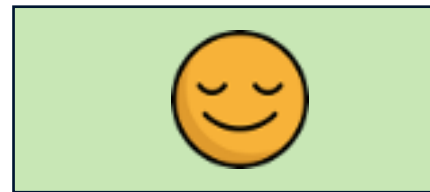
- **Model EF skills** yourself
 - Children copy what the parents do!
 - Show how you plan, organize, and manage emotions.
 - Talk aloud to demonstrate what you are doing when its not obvious.



General Parenting Approaches

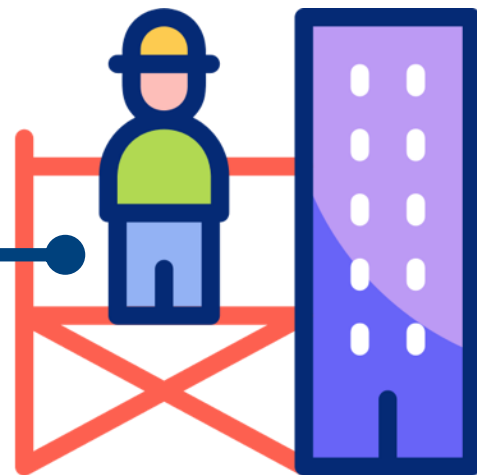
- Use **scaffolding**:

- Start by providing all the support your child needs to manage and be in their 'green zone'.
- Tell yourself, "Its for now, not for ever..."
- By providing your child the support they need so that their brain can be calm, their brain can properly develop.
- If a child is struggling with being overwhelmed, the brain will not develop to its full potential.
- Gradually reduce your support over time, as your child builds independence.



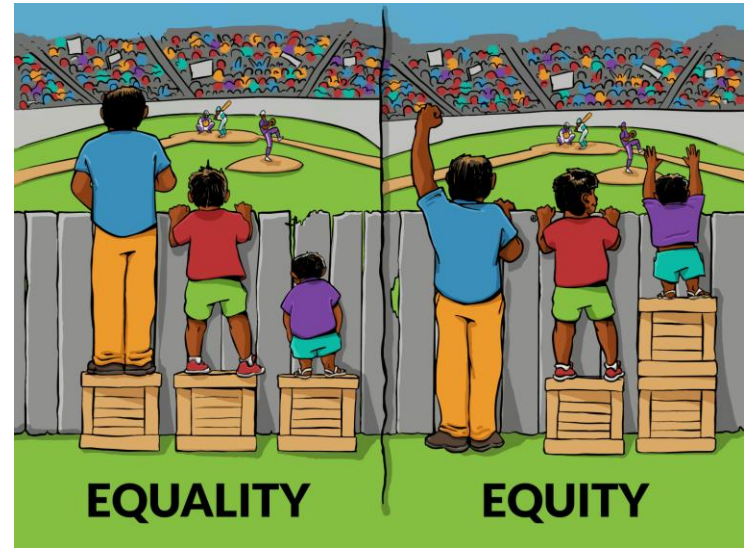
Research Shows Many Things Can Help!

- Environmental modification / scaffolding
 - Reducing EF load
 - Simplifying tasks,
 - Structuring environments,
 - Giving external reminders/settings
 - Helping parents/teachers to scaffold tasks, for example
 - Helping organize schoolwork
 - Structure time.



General Parenting Approaches

- Use **scaffolding**:
 - Are others giving you a hard time for giving all this support to the person who needs it?
 - When we give the person what they need, they will best be able to grow and develop...



General Parenting Approaches






- Provide positive feedback
 - **Give praise, encouragement, gratitude** for effort, not just results.
 - Parent
 - “I notice that you tried / doing ...”
 - ‘Thank you for’

Building Routines and Structure

- Having habits and routines means that the brain does them automatically, reducing cognitive load and decision fatigue.

Establish Predictable Daily Routines

- Example of a **Visual Schedule** for Morning Routine...

6-7 AM		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wake up
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breakfast
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brush teeth, get dressed, etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get ready for school (or work)
815 AM		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walking to bus stop

Establish Predictable Daily Routines

- Example of a Morning Checklist for a Teen

- ☐ Breakfast
- ☐ Medication(s).
- ☐ Brush teeth
- ☐ Put on deodorant.
- ☐ Wallet
- ☐ Presto Card
- ☐ Cellphone
- ☐ Homework
- ☐ School bag

External Reminder Systems

- Its hard to keep track of everything in our brains.
- Use an 'external brain' to support your working memory, thus:
 - Planners,
 - Reminders,
 - Agenda
 - Helpful especially in older children/adolescents, as they have more demands, and less support in the school.

DAILY PLANNER

DATE : _____ S M T W T F S

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

6-7 AM	
7-8 AM	
8-9 AM	
9-10 AM	
10-11 AM	
11-12 AM	
12-1 PM	
1-2 PM	
2-3 PM	
3-4 PM	
4-5 PM	
5-6 PM	
6-7 PM	
7-8 PM	
8-9 PM	

TOP PRIORITIES

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

TODAY'S GOAL

APPOINTMENT

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

NOTES

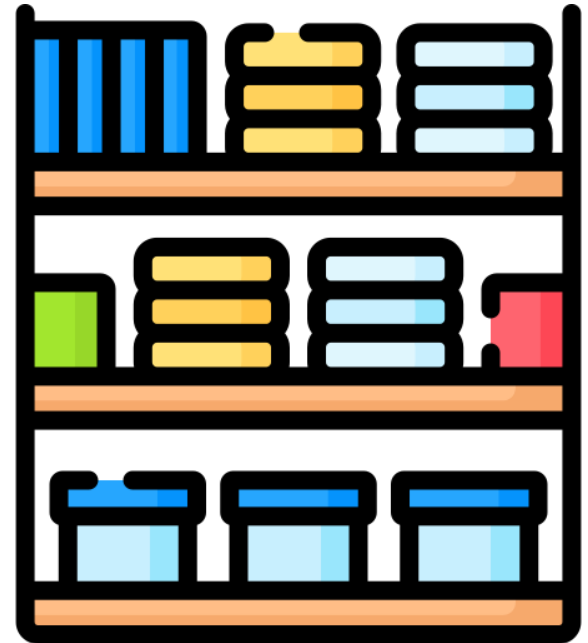
Ask for “Scaffolding” If You Need Help

- Troubles remembering appointments?
 - Write things down yourself;
 - Ask the professional if they can
 - Write down a key summary for you;
 - Email you or text you reminders for appointments.



Teach Organization (starting at Home)

- Support your kids to be organized at home
- Need help?
 - Many wonderful 'declutter' / 'how to organize' guides on the Internet.



Reducing Decision Fatigue / Cognitive Load



Reducing Decision Fatigue / Cognitive Load



Supporting Goal Setting

- Develop goal setting
 - Set **goals**,
 - Break them into steps
 - Track progress visually.



The Power of Nudges



"Baby steps!"

What Parents Can Do

Strategies for Specific EF Skills

1. Response Inhibition (RI) (aka Impulse Control)

- Strategies

- Playing turn-taking games; losing a game
- Doing activities that involve multiple steps before the reward
 - Cooking, baking, etc.
- Drumming
 - Learning how to drum (i.e. Drumming lessons) have been shown to help with multiple executive functions, including impulse control.
- Reinforce **self-control moments**
 - Parent: “I noticed you waited your turn—thank you for being so patient!”



Step 1



Step 2, etc.



2. Working Memory (WM)

- Strategies
 - Give students information in multiple formats
 - Teach students to use visuals, and other memory strategies.
 - Teach students to “over-learn”, i.e. practice material until error-free.
 - Teach them to be active readers
 - When reading, teach them to underline, highlight or jot key words down.



Visual



Auditory



Tactile

2. Working Memory (WM)

- Strategies
 - Encourage use of **external supports (aka the external brain)**
 - Sticky notes,
 - Phone reminders,
 - Drawing diagrams to hold information.
 - Practice repeating instructions aloud to reinforce recall.
 - Memory-building games
 - Card games, “Simon Says,” or repeating back sequences.



3. Emotional Control (EC), Part 1

- Emotional control is the ability to keep emotions calm (green zone) and manage difficult emotions, aka **self-regulation**.
- Strategies
 - Help your child learn how to recognize and identify emotional (i.e. zones/ states) such as
 - Bored / understimulated
 - Green zone
 - Yellow zone (frustrated, upset)
 - Red zone (fight/flight, e.g. aggression, panic)



3. Emotional Control (EC), Part 2

- Strategies
 - Identify what triggers or gets your child into each zone
 - Bored / understimulated
 - Green zone
 - Yellow zone (frustrated, upset)
 - Red zone (fight/flight, e.g. aggression, panic)



3. Emotional Control (EC), Part 3

- Strategies

- Identify what triggers or gets your child into each zone

- Bored / understimulated

- When bored, **what helps?**

- Green zone

- When calm and in “green zone”, what to continue doing?

- Yellow zone (frustrated, upset)

- When in yellow, what to do? Usually empathy/validation.

- Red zone (fight/flight, e.g. aggression, panic)

- When in red zone, what to do? Usually give time and space for the storm to pass.



3. Emotional Control (EC), Part 3

- **Self-regulation is a complete topic and presentation unto itself!**



4. Cognitive Flexibility (F)

- Strategies
 - Do problem-solving with kids
 - Encourage the student to come up with at least 3 different. strategies
 - Give advance notice of any changes.
 - Have “flexibility” challenges where you set certain times for things to be different, so that they can experience safely dealing with changes.
 - E.g. slightly tweak the daily routine.
 - Activities that make the left brain work with the right brain, or the upper body work with the lower body help with cognitive flexibility such as
 - Braingym / Crosscrawls
 - Expose the child to humor
 - Humor requires flexibility.



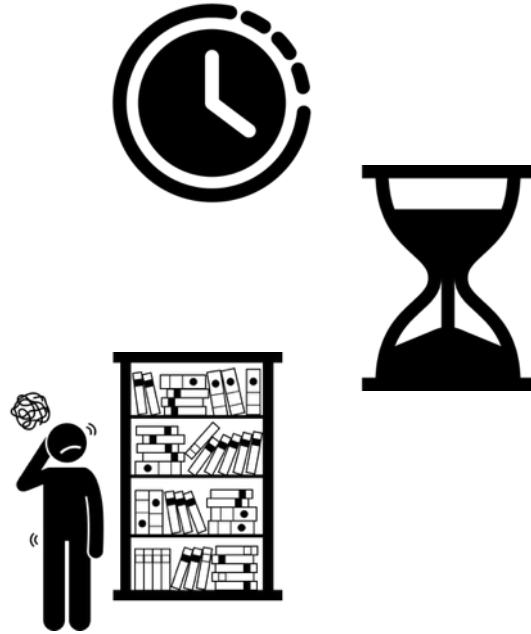
4. Cognitive Flexibility (F)

- Strategies
 - Expose children to **changes in routine** in small, predictable ways (e.g., trying a new route home).
 - Use role-play to practice seeing different perspectives (“What might your friend be feeling if…”).
 - Play board games that require changing rules or adapting strategies.



5. Sustained Attention (SA) (aka Distractibility)

- Strategies to improve attention span
 - Include Physical Activity.
 - Have "Attention Breaks"
 - Adjust Time Frames.
 - Remove Visual Distractions.
 - Play Memory Games.
 - Rate (and Change) Tasks.
 - Break Tasks into Pieces.

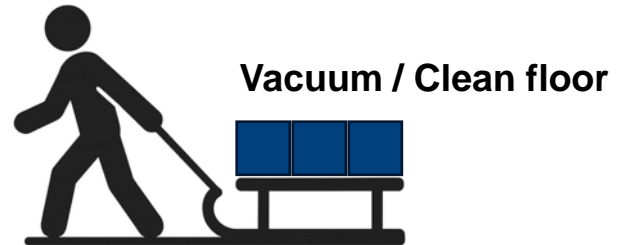
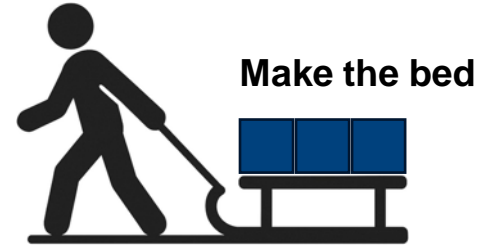
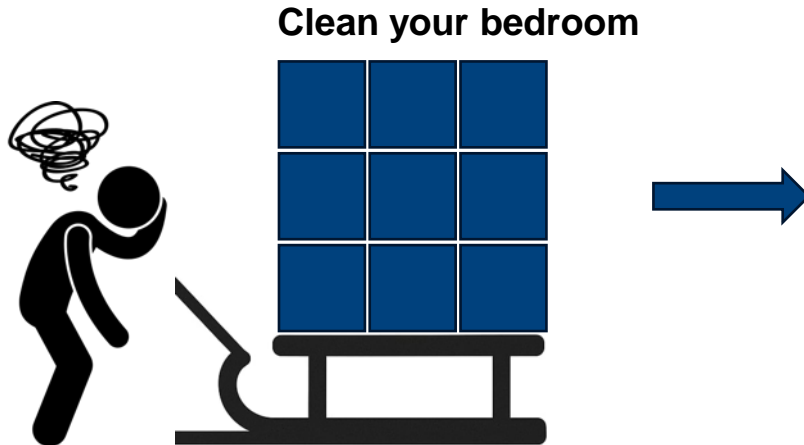


6. Task Initiation (TI)

- Strategies

- Unable to start a task?

- When a task or problem is too big, it can become overwhelming, leading people to take “flight, fight or freeze”
 - Break the problem, or tasks into smaller parts.



6. Task Initiation (TI)

- Strategies
 - Sensory regulation strategies
 - Is the task too “boring”?
 - In order to focus, the brain does best when it has ‘just enough stimulation’.
 - Increase dopamine / adrenaline by putting on background noise or music; etc.
 - Is the brain too overstimulated?
 - Reduce sensory overload
 - Work in a quieter place.
 - Tidy up and remove visual clutter.

START



7. Planning/Prioritization (PP)

- Strategies

- At the beginning of each day, talk to the child about what the plan is going to be.
- Is there a specific goal or expectation?
 - Clarify the goal
 - Practice making a plan to reach those goals.
- Teach the difference between
 - Needs vs. Wants



7. Planning/Prioritization (PP)

- Strategies
 - Involve children in family decision-making
 - Planning a meal, or outing
 - Parent
 - "It's your birthday this weekend! Let's plan your birthday dinner!" "What do you think?"
 - "Let's come up with some ideas and write them down."
 - "Birthday dinner at home"
 - Pros - Saves \$\$\$
 - Cons - More work for the family, etc.
 - Option 2
 - Pros
 - Cons

8. Organization (O)

- Strategies
 - Every item should have its own home or place to go
 - E.g. when you get home, have a bowl for the keys, wallet, cellphone, Presto card, etc.
 - **Planners, calendars, or apps** to track assignments, appointments, and responsibilities.
 - Packing bags the **night before** school.



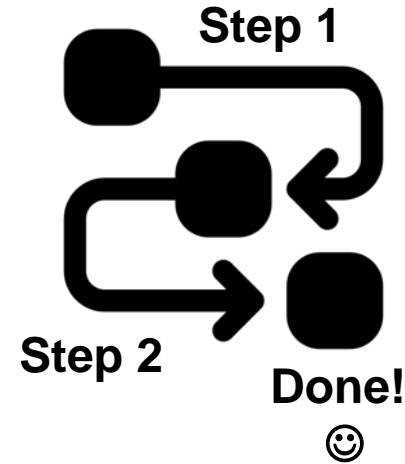
8. Organization (O)

- Strategies
 - Teach multiple ways to prioritize. ...
 - Prioritizing by goals
 - By due date
 - Break down large projects into smaller parts.
 - Designate a place for study materials. ...
 - Have **one** place where you put things.
 - Model organization skills, for example
 - Have a family calendar, and a family “TO DO” list
 - Use a whiteboard so that easily you can make visuals.
 - Give your teen a paper or digital planner, so that they can start writing down key activities.
 - Ask the student what they are planning to do?



9. Time Management (TM)

- Strategies
 - Have a visible clock on the wall.
 - Have a visual schedule for the day / week.
 - Encourage students to estimate time
 - When your student has an assignment, ask the student how long it will take.



10. Goal Directed Persistence (GDP)

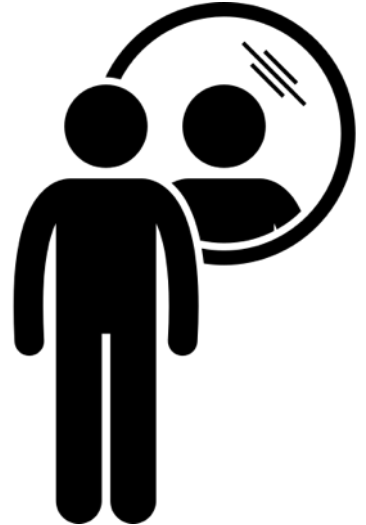
- Strategies
 - Establishing and breaking down appropriate goals
 - Creating incentives and rewards for the completion of goals
 - Clearly defining goals and why you are motivated to complete them
 - Use SMART goals.



11. Metacognition (M) (Self-Awareness)

- Strategies

- Teach students that their brains are wired to grow and change (i.e. “growth mindset”) as opposed to their brains are fixed.
- Have students read great, classic literature, whereby readers can empathize and see the perspective of main characters.
- Ask “What was the most confusing / difficult part of ____?”
- Have students keep a learning journal
 - “What was easiest to learn this week? Why?”
 - “What was the most difficult to learn this week? Why?”
 - What study habits worked best for me?
 - What study habit will I try to improve for next week?



<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-pathways-metacognition-in-classroom-marilyn-price-mitchell>

11. Metacognition (M) (Self-Awareness)

- Strategies
 - Ask reflective questions after activities: “What went well? What would you do differently next time?”
 - Use tools like **daily check-ins** (e.g., “How was your focus today, 1–5?”).
 - Encourage celebrating small successes to build confidence.

Too Busy?

- Find an empty space (e.g. bulletin board, or wall) and post some EF posters such as "BASIC EF DEFINITIONS" and "EF IDEAS" from <https://activatedlearning.org>
- Then, when teachable moments come up, refer to the EF definitions and EF ideas to discuss.
- For example
 - Is the class frustrated about unexpected changes?
 - Talk about Flexibility (F).
 - Use a self-compassion approach, to validate that it is natural that we can all get frustrated from time to time with unexpected changes.
 - Talk about how being flexible is one way to cope.

Do Your Loved Ones Hate Being Told What to Do? Consider Declarative Language

Declarative Language

- Bad news
 - While adults have all this wonderful wisdom to give to our children and youth, some child/youth do not like being told what to do, and it gets worse as they grow older.
- Possible solution
 - Declarative language is talking in a way that:
 - Does not make the person feel pressured
 - Does make the person feel accepted.
 - It often uses
 - Observations
 - Sharing our
 - Senses, e.g. “I see / hear / smell”
 - Feelings, e.g. “I feel...”
 - Thoughts, e.g. “I notice / remember / think...”

Declarative Language

Instead of ...	Try Declaratives (gentle statements that don't pressure)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "What did I say about interrupting me?"	"I'm having a hard time finishing my thought!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Clean up your mess right now!"	"I wonder how we can get this space ready for dinner?"
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "You need to put your shoes on."	"It's time to get ready. Which shoes would you like to wear?"

Declarative Language

- Morning routine examples

Instead of Imperatives (commands)...	Try Declaratives (gentle statements that don't pressure)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Wake up, its time for school"	"Good morning! I love you! Let me give you a hug!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Get dressed!"	"I've put your clothes on the bed."
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Go brush your teeth!"	"I love it when we can brush our teeth together."

Declarative Language

Instead of accusatory questions ...	Try instead using some Declaratives (gentle statements that don't pressure)
After school, at home	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">“Go outside and get some exercise!”	“Wow, what a beautiful day outside.” “I wonder how many times you can bike around the block before you need a break...”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">“You forgot to turn off the TV -- can you please turn it off?”	“Wow, the TV is still on!”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">“We only have 15-minutes before your karate class! Let's go!”	“Wow, its 6 PM. Its time to get ready so we can leave by 6:30 PM..” “ <i>I wonder</i> if you can get ready in just 15-minutes...” “Let's get ready together..”

Declarative Language

Instead of accusatory questions ...	Try instead using some Declaratives (gentle statements that don't pressure)
Dropping off at school	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Say hi to your teacher..."• "Look your teacher in the eyes when you're talking to them."	<p>"Oh, your teacher is over there!"</p> <p>"Your teacher is looking over at us..."</p> <p>"Your teacher looks so happy to see us."</p> <p>"I remember the last time your teacher looked at us that you did something..."</p>

Declarative Language

Instead of accusatory questions ...	Try instead using some Declaratives (gentle statements that don't pressure)
Routines	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Come to dinner!"	"Dinner is ready. Its so much more delicious when its warm than cold!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Can you please feed the dog?"	The dog looks hungry.

Declarative Language

Instead of accusatory questions ...	Try instead using some Declaratives (gentle)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Put away your homework!”	“I notice your homework is still on the table. How will it get to school?”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “You’re still not done! You’re going to get bad grade.”	“I notice you’ve finished the outline. What’s next on the TO DO list? Anything I can do to help?” “

Declarative Language Examples

Instead of...	Try Declaratives (gentle statements)
<p>"What a complete mess! How inconsiderate!"</p> <p>"Clean up this mess!"</p>	<p>"I love that horse!"</p> <p>Less pressure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I see the markers are taking over the table!"• Take a pen, and hand it to your daughter to put away, "Here you go!" <p>More pressure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Would you like my help tidying things up?"



Declarative Language for Married Couples

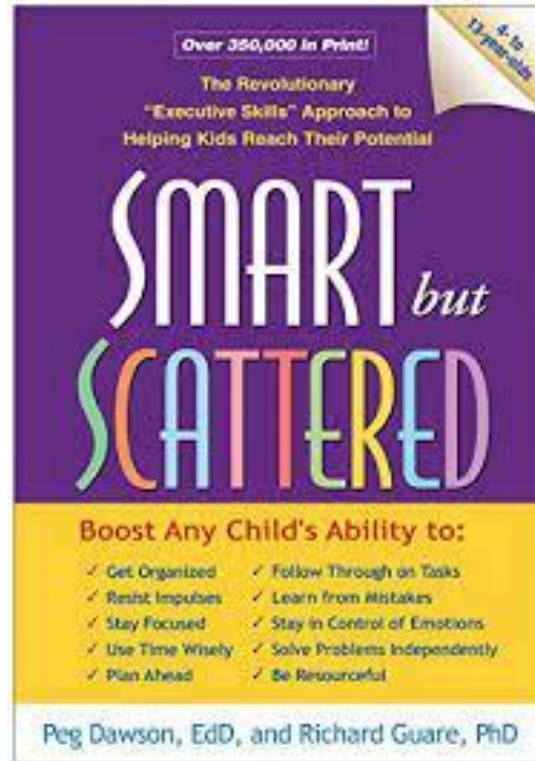
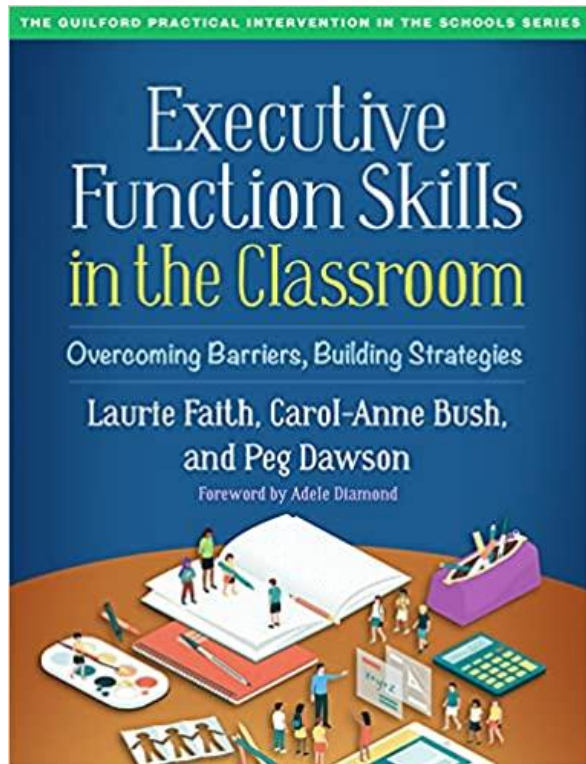
Instead of making demands	Try Declaratives (gentle statements that don't pressure)
Married Couple	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">At a restaurant, your spouse says, "Give me some of your food to try!"	When at a restaurant... Your spouse says, "Your food looks really good -- I wonder what that tastes like?"
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your spouse says, "Turn down the heat, its too hot!"	"Wow, its hot. Are you hot?"

Declarative Language for Elderly Relatives

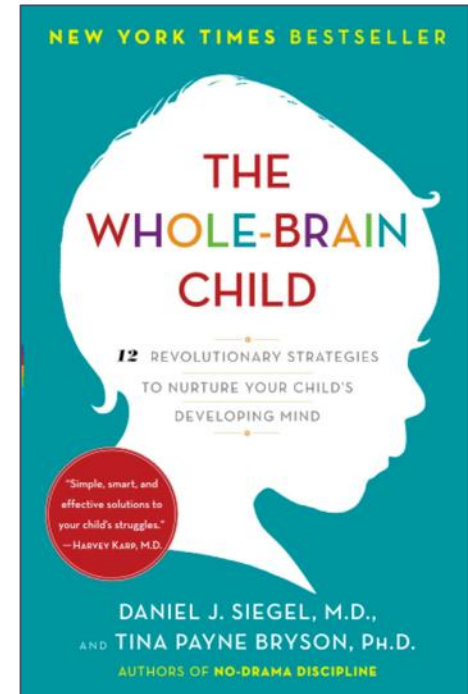
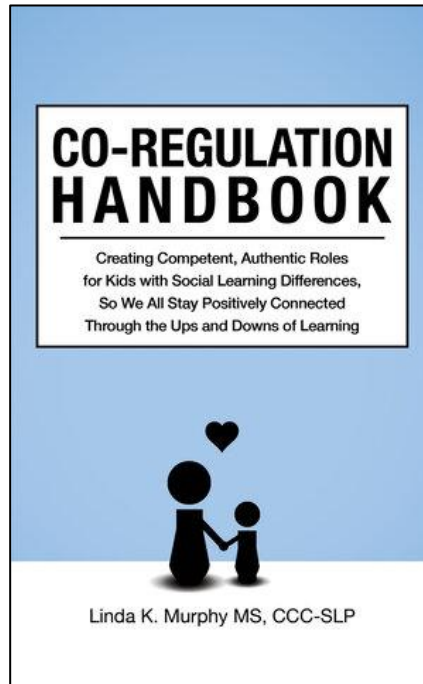
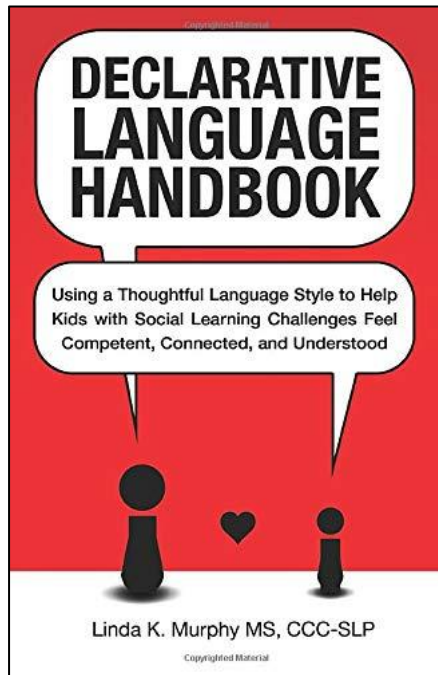
Instead of Commands / Demands...	Try Declaratives
"You should really use a cane! I don't want to go to the Emergency Department again with you!"	"I wonder where your cane is... Ah, here you go!"



Resources for Adults to Help Students with Executive Function Skills



Resources for Adults to Help Students with Executive Function Skills



Free Teaching Materials from Laurie Faith

EF Basics

**A Series of 11 Mini-Lessons
to Build Whole-Class EF Literacy**

(Grades 2 and Up)

Includes

- 1 “Magic Words” teacher inspiration card
- 2 Classroom Posters
- 1 Teaching guide page
- 11 pages of Supplementary Notes
- 11 Student Worksheets

Activated Learning Teaching Approach, © Laurie Faith, 2018, @LCFaith, ActivatedLearning.org

<http://activatedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EF-BASICS-LESSON-SERIES-PDF.pdf>



Objectives

- By the end of this session, participants will be able to:
 - List what children and youth need for mental health and wellness;
 - Name the components of executive function skills, and how problems with executive function can block us from reaching mental health and wellness;
 - List simple ways (including tweaks and nudges) on how families and caregivers can support executive function to help our youth overcome executive function barriers to reach mental health and wellness.



Summary

- Executive function (EF) skills—like impulse control, emotional regulation, planning, and flexible thinking—are essential for daily functioning and success in life.
- However, many people struggle with poor EF skills. They may simply be delayed, or they may have brain or medical conditions (such as ADHD, learning differences) where EF skills may be lagging.
- Unfortunately, when a person struggles with poor impulse control, they often receive blame or punishment from others – **which doesn't teach the missing skills.**
- But even if they receive empathy and kindness from others, this alone **doesn't teach the missing skills either!**
- The good news – when we can recognize a person's struggles at school, work or home as missing a brain skill, we can start with empathy.
- And then we can further support EF development through specific strategies...

Questions?

